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FASTBACK

Fostering Social Responsibility

Marvin Marshall

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Fostering Social Responsibility

Marvin Marshall, Ed.D.

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Marvin Marshall is a professional speaker and seminar leader who has been certified by and is active with the William Glasser Institute, the Deming Management Alliance of Southern California, and the National Speakers Association.

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Additional information about fostering social responsibility can be obtained at **www.marvinmarshall.com.**

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

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Introduction

As the train conductor made his way down the aisle collecting tickets, the forgetful Oliver Wendell Holmes saw him coming. The Associate Justice reached into his pocket—first into one, then into another, then into a third pocket. When the conductor arrived in front of the then-frantic Justice Holmes, the conductor said, “That’s all right, Mr. Holmes. I know who you are. When you arrive home and find your ticket, just mail it in.” To this Holmes replied, “You don’t understand. It’s not the ticket I’m concerned about. Where am I going?”

Violence, gang activities, and graffiti—all prevalent in our society—are manifestations of a lack of social responsibility. Were Justice Holmes alive today, he might well ask of our society, “Where are we going?” America looks to its schools for teaching social responsibility because schools set the foundation for a civil, democratic society and must provide a bedrock of self-discipline. (Goleman 1995, p. 285).

When a student disrupts a lesson in a classroom, that student is showing lack of concern, or active disregard, for other students’ right to learn and the teacher’s right to teach. That student is demonstrating a lack of social responsibility, and the absence of a sense of social responsibility seems to be reaching epidemic proportions. In my home state of California, for example, various reports show that 50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years. My conversations with many former teachers lead me to believe that disruptive behavior is among the prime reasons for their exit.

The most recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools confirms that irresponsible student behavior is nationwide and is viewed as the number-one problem of schools (Rose et al. 1997, p. 46). This is quite a challenge when the “worst offenses only a generation was chewing gum and whispering in class” (Elam 1995, p. 41)

Stanley Elam’s analysis of the PDK/Gallup Polls in *How America Views Its Schools* points out that the problem of social irresponsibility is a result of “societal problems” (Elam 1995, p. 50). Until the 1960s, the entire community usually assisted in fostering social responsibility. The core values of the home, the school, the community, and the media reinforced each other. Children then came to school understanding basic values and possessing sufficient social skills so that the teacher and class could function with relatively few problems. In addition, students in that earlier day often were more goal-oriented toward their future roles in life. Today, that orientation has changed; students (and people in general) are more concerned with personal identity and personal rights.

Many students spend hours in front of televisions and computer monitors. While this new technology offers much promise for education, the disadvantage is that today’s youngsters engage in fewer face-to-face interactions and human socialization activities. This negatively affects their development of social skills, such as working in teams, which educators and employers agree will be increasingly required in our interdependent workplaces.

Societal changes alter the nature of youth and require a different approach to engendering social responsibility—different from traditional strategies of telling, punishing, and rewarding. This e-book explains an approach for fostering social responsibility in the

classroom while simultaneously handling disruptive behaviors simply and easily. The strategy aids in establishing and maintaining a noncoercive, trusting environment—the first requirement of a quality classroom (Glasser 1992).

Theory and Clarifications

In order to successfully implement the program I am outlining, a clear understanding of its underlying principles is critical. Implementation is successful only with knowledge of the theory behind the practice. What W. Edwards Deming, the American who brought quality and reduced costs to Japanese manufacturing, said of his own process is applicable here: "Unless you understand the theory behind it, trying to copy it can lead to complete chaos" (Deming 1986).

Curriculum, Instruction, Classroom Management, and Discipline

When a student disrupts a lesson, the teacher needs to reflect on whether the disruption is related to curriculum, instruction, classroom management, or discipline. Although these ideas are related, they are not synonymous. Differentiation can guide the teacher to the most effective resolution of the problem.

Curriculum has to do with what is taught. A prime purpose for public schools is to pass on knowledge, skills, and beliefs that support society's values. This is the role of curriculum. The government, professional associations, state boards of education, local school boards, individual schools, and the community all affect curriculum. Student perception regarding the meaningfulness or usefulness of the curriculum can be tied to student behaviors. If students see that what is being taught is meaningful, then their interest is captured and disruptive behavior will be minimal.

Instruction is about how information is conveyed and how strategies for learning are used. It involves planning lessons, teaching, and assessing the extent of learning. I use the acronym L.I.M.E.S. to remind me of several factors to consider in instruction.

L refers to *"left-right brain"* activities. For example, some students learn better with sequential and linear tasks, such as outlining (typically a left-brain activity). Others find holistic and random patterns, such as mind mapping or graphic organizing (right-brain activity), more conducive to organizing and remembering information.

I reminds me of different *intelligences*, "things that are valued in the world" (Gardner 1997, p. 12). Students are smart in different ways: Words (linguistic), reasoning and numbers (logical/mathematical), and pictures (spatial) smart are traditional ways that have been used to measure school performance. Other intelligences include attention to sounds (musical), the body (kinesthetic), other people (interpersonal), one's self (intrapersonal), and the natural environment (naturalist). Planning lessons that tap into various intelligences increases interest in learning among a wider range of students.

M refers to learning *modalities*—audio, visual, kinesthetic/ tactual, and, in a home economics course, for example, olfactory and gustatory. Verbal connectors are used. “You can *see* the predicament” and “This *looks* like we can all do it” (visual). “You can *hear* what he would be saying” and “Does that *sound* reasonable?” (auditory). “This helps me *grasp* the issue” and “*Raise your hand* if you get a feeling for her point” (kinesthetic/tactual). Auditory learners need to *hear themselves*, and so “talk time” must be planned.

E reminds me of the relationship between *emotions* and learning. For example, anxiety sabotages clear thinking. When students are anxious, the emotional mind interferes with the rational mind. Teachers should be mindful to introduce new lessons and topics in a manner that will reduce anxiety by relating new information to knowledge that the students already possess or by using an enjoyable activity to pique interest.

Finally, *S* refers to *styles.* Four behavioral styles emerge from the many types of commonly used inventories: a *thinker* analyzes, a *feeler* expresses, a *doer* is oriented toward results, and a *relater* is focused on relationships. A teacher whose style is dominantly that of a thinker and doer may have a propensity to provide fewer learning opportunities for children who are feelers and relaters. But such strategies as cooperative learning afford opportunities for students of all styles.

Awareness of these factors should assist teachers in planning instruction that engages students’ interests and thus reduces socially irresponsible classroom behaviors.

Glasser makes the point that it does no more good to push a student who does not want to learn than it does to get tough with a worker who is looking for another job (1986, p. 74). So-called discipline problems often stem from faulty instruction. Good instruction reduces behavior problems. Lessons need to be planned so that 1) students understand why the lesson is meaningful, 2) the lesson involves thinking on various levels, and 3) students become actively involved in learning. The goal is to make students want to learn.

Two additional considerations are appropriate here. First, homework is an extension of instruction. Homework is related to teaching and learning, not to discipline or punishment for bad behavior. Second, students would rather be disruptive than stupid. Therefore, the more that a student “bonds” with the lesson, the less likely there will be any disruption. Effective teachers encourage. It is important that teachers convey the message that every student is capable, even though some may need more time and assistance than others.

Classroom management has to do with how instruction is made efficient. Too often, teachers assume that students know routine procedures that need to be taught. For example, routines should be established for borrowing pencils, distributing materials, taking roll, cleaning up, etc. Teaching procedures is the key to good classroom management.

Discipline has to do with standards, rather than simply with procedures. Behavioral standards exist in any continuing social relationship, and the classroom is no exception. Appropriate classroom behavior is a result of the awareness of such standards or, in other words, the result of social consciousness. The objective of good discipline is to increase self-responsibility, social awareness, and social responsibility.

> To many people, discipline means punishment. But, actually, *to discipline means to teach*. Rather than punishment, discipline should be a positive way of helping and guiding children to achieve self-control. (National PTA1993)

Self-development and self-correction (learning self-control) are most effective with *intrinsic motivation*. External manipulators may compel obedience, but they do not tend to encourage good choices for personal growth, especially in adolescents, who often are powerfully influenced by peer pressure. Intrinsic motivation is fostered in a positive learning environment where people feel they will not be harmed, where they are given choices that encourage ownership in projects and assignments, and where self-evaluation and self-correction are the dominant approaches to growth.

Teachers need to determine if socially irresponsible behavior in the classroom falls under the domain of 1) curriculum, 2) instruction, 3) classroom management, or 4) discipline. Thinking of these four domains as separate entities can help teachers diagnose and treat classroom problems.

Guidance and Counseling

One dictionary definition of counseling is “professional guidance in resolving personal conflicts and emotional problems.” When a student is sent to the office because of disruptive behavior, a counselor or administrator “disciplines” with the aim of fostering social responsibility. How should the student adjust his or her behavior in order to conform to society’s standards—most often, the “society” of the school or classroom? It may be easiest to understand the role of school counseling by contrasting it to privately available therapeutic counseling. These two forms of counseling differ in three ways.

First, in therapeutic counseling the client recognizes a problem. In schools, a disrupting student often does not recognize his or her disruptive behavior as a problem. Even when the problems are identified, students may not “own” the problem. The disrupting student may believe that the problem “belongs” to another student, to the teacher, to the whole class or school, or to some external entity. Thus problem ownership is a first hurdle to overcome in counseling the disruptive student.

Second, in therapeutic counseling the client seeks the counselor’s assistance. In a school setting the disrupting student is referred to the counselor. The student does not walk into the counselor’s office seeking behavioral advice. Even when a client meets for therapy to satisfy some requirement of an intervention program (court-imposed alcohol or drug counseling), that person still has some motivation to participate in order to satisfy the imposed requirement. There is no such motivation in school counseling as it relates to behavior change.

Third, in therapeutic counseling the agenda is the client’s. The therapist does not come to the session with a predetermined agenda. In school behavioral counseling, there is an agenda: to assist the student to become more socially responsible.

It is important to keep in mind these differences, because behavior counseling in schools really refers to the socializing process—that is, to the fostering of social responsibility. But

the most effective place for this socialization to take place is the classroom, not the counselor's or principal's office.

Counselors and principals, however, have the luxury of one-on-one meeting with students. Teachers do not. How, then, can teachers foster social responsibility most effectively? The answer lies in good teaching before counseling becomes necessary. Instruction and guidance are the first two parts of the program described in the next section and handle the vast majority of classroom disruptions.

Developing Students' Social Skills

The more social skills young people have, the more successful they will be in school and, later, in the workplace. Typically, profiles of employability skills list personal and teamwork skills, rather than specific academic knowledge (SCANS 1993, p. 6). Intra- and interpersonal skills, rather than factual information, are what employers desire most in employees. "People skills" are essential, and "interdependence"—neither dependence nor independence—is a prime requirement.

The development of social skills requires proactive teaching, which sometimes is wrongly interpreted as merely establishing rules and consequences. The consequences often follow a procedure of putting names and checkmarks on the chalkboard. But this approach really is reactive, not proactive, because the disruptive behavior is dealt with *after* a student interrupts the lesson. A proactive approach differs from "do's" and "don'ts" rules in that there is a *thinking* component. Explaining concepts and standards to students is proactive. The aim of the teacher is to foster a commitment to social responsibility, rather than to compel obedience to a rule.

In this program, teachers use both deductive teaching and a constructivist approach to instruction. Deduction starts with the general and moves to the specific. This is in contrast to teaching skills by using an inductive approach (specific to general). Letters, numbers, and the processes that use them are constant. In contrast, relationships are not. As situations change, behaviors also change. In addition, teaching social responsibility by a deductive approach embodies the notion that students can evaluate their own behavior, which is one reason that a deductive approach is highly successful.

By teaching general concepts, rather than setting specific rules and consequences, the teacher provides students with a conceptual framework for assessing their own behaviors. Once that framework has been established, the pattern is set for self-evaluation. The process of developing social responsibility then follows a constructivist approach, which emphasizes thinking, understanding, and self-control (Zahorik 1995, p. 8). Constructivist teaching is based on the notion that humans are constructors of their own knowledge, rather than merely reproducers of someone else's knowledge. When a student behaves irresponsibly, the teacher helps the student to identify the appropriate concept. This guidance approach allows the student, not the teacher, to take ownership of the problem.

It must be remembered that most school relationships are involuntary. Students usually are assigned to their classes, and so their relationship with the teacher is not a matter of choice. The same is true of relationships with classmates (and will be true in the future workplace, where workers seldom directly choose their co-workers). Fostering social

responsibility, therefore, means developing the social skills needed to coalesce with strangers, to form working relationships that may or may not incorporate friendship (voluntary association).

In his essay, “Politics and the English Language,” George Orwell referred to the relationship of words, meanings, and their significance. If there were no word for *freedom*, the concept would be hard to grasp. Having a word or label for a concept assists in the development of the concept itself. Such is the case with the vocabulary and concepts of the program. However, when teaching concepts, it is not the definitions that are most important. Rather, the key to understanding lies in the illustrative examples, the stories, that draw mental pictures of the concept as it pertains to the classroom. Such examples enlarge the definition. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “The mind, stretched to a new idea, can never return to its original dimension.” So it is with the exposure to a hierarchy of social development concepts. The program that I describe in the next section employs seven practices:

1. Communicate responsibility, not victimization. Regardless of the situation, stimulus, or urge, people choose their own responses.

2. Provide choices. Choice empowers. It is a fundamental principle in motivation (McGregor 1960; Deming 1986; Covey 1990; Senge 1990; Glasser 1965, 1992; Oakley and Krug 1993; and Kohn 1993). I will say more about choice in a moment.

3. Teach self-evaluation. No lasting skills will be developed until students “own” them and can examine their own behaviors. Stephen Covey wrote, “In all my experiences I have never seen lasting solutions to problems, lasting happiness and success, that came from the outside in” (1990, p. 43).

4. Encourage self-correction. This is the natural outcome of self-evaluation and the essential next step in developing social responsibility.

5. Discuss motivation. Acting responsibly is more gratifying through intrinsic motivation.

6. Be positive. People (students and adults) learn and perform better when they feel good. Punishment, or the threat of punishment, is not useful in this program.

7. Be tough without being punitive. Growth is greater when authority is used without punishment.

Finally, a few words are needed to amplify the notion of choice. One of my favorite cartoons shows a young student explaining his report card to his parents. “No use debating environment versus genetic causes,” he says. “Either way it’s your fault.” The youngster’s comment is an echo of the adult expression: “I had no choice.” But the reality is that people do have choices, regardless of the situation, stimulus, or urge.

Assume for a moment that one student hits another student. The person who received the blow retaliates by hitting back. The teacher sees only the action of the second student and calls him on it. The student tells the teacher, “He made me do it.” Justifiable response or not? Students need to learn that regardless of the stimulus—in this case the person who did the hitting first—people have a choice of responses. Both students made the choice to

hit. The first student did not choose the second student's response; the second student chose his own response. That is a social responsibility lesson: "owning" one's responses, or more globally, making appropriate choices in social situations.

External-control thinking—"he made me do it"—makes "victims" of individuals who might otherwise exercise social responsibility. The message of social responsibility is that everyone has choices, and making responsible choices is a behavior that needs to be fostered.

In contrast to external-control thinking, choice-response thinking encourages self-control, self-evaluation, and self-correction and is the basis for developing social responsibility.

The Raise Responsibility System

The Raise Responsibility System follows a three phase model: 1) teaching vocabulary and concepts (proactive teaching), 2) checking for understanding (effective questioning), and 3) using guided choices (if necessary, using authority without punishment).

Vocabulary and Concepts

The system begins with understanding the levlels of the *Hierarchy of Social Development.* These levels can be taught to any age group and in the context of any subject because students can relate the concepts to their own situations. Thus it is important to use examples, rather than just teaching definitions.

There are four levels of social development: Anarchy, Bullying, Conformity, and Democracy. These levels or concepts are explained below.

Note: The two unacceptable lower levels refer to *behavioral levels*.The two higher levels refer to *motivation*. The goal is to be motivated on the highest level.

• ***Anarchy***, meaning "without rule," is the lowest level of social behavior. Absence of government, aimlessness, and chaos characterize anarchy, which is an enemy of civilization—including the civil society of the classroom.

• ***Bullying and bothering*** is the next level. Neither level A nor level B is appropriate or acceptable in the classroom. Bullies and botherers boss others, behave boisterously, break rules, and behave only when the threat of punishment looms. Such students only obey authority figures and do not exercise self-control. (A note of caution is in order: Students are never called bullies. Teachers focus on the behavioral level, not the individual or the behavior.)

• ***Conformity*** is the next level. Conforming students are compliant, cooperative, and considerate of others, but their motivation for conforming is *external*, rather than internal.

• ***Democracy*** is the highest level. Democratic behavior is shown by the student who develops self-reliance, civility, and a sense of responsibility for the classroom community. This student chooses good behavior from a sense of self-evaluation and self-correction. The motivation on this level is *internal*.

Clearly, the highest level is the level of truly responsible social behavior. It is to that level that teachers should aspire to move their students through the hierarchy.

The difference between C and D is motivation, not action. If a student picks up a scrap of paper from the classroom floor at the teacher's direction, the student is acting on level C; the student has complied with the teacher's direction. This is good behavior. Conforming is necessary in any society. However, if the student picks up the paper without the teacher asking him to do so, then he is operating at level D. There is little difference in the two

actions, but the motivation is external in the first and internal in the second. This is a simple explanation that students of any age can understand.

It is important to use this vocabulary so that students become familiar with the terms and can relate them clearly to the concepts. During the initial learning phase, this is important because of the hierarchical nature of teaching social development. After the students are familiar with the concepts, they may simply refer to the levels as A, B, C, and D.

Teaching the Concepts

The manner in which the concepts are taught will depend on the age of the students, their maturity level, and the subject matter. For example, at the kindergarten and primary levels, one concept might be introduced each day, using a story to illustrate it. For example, *Miss Nelson Is Missing* can be used for level A. In this story the students take advantage of Miss Nelson, their teacher. While the students are out of control, Miss Nelson suddenly is replaced by an authoritarian teacher. After good decorum is re-established and the classroom is no long chaotic—in other words, the students have become socially responsible—Miss Nelson returns. The point of this story is that during anarchy, in order to re-establish order, an authority figure takes over and becomes "the boss."

In similar fashion, *The Three Little Pigs* can be used for level B to show how the wolf makes his own rules and bullies the little pigs. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* can be used to illustrate level C in that the dwarfs, though very different from one another, accept their responsibilities by going to work each day in the ore mine. And *The Hole in the Dike*, about the little Dutch boy who put his finger in the dike and saved the town, can illustrate level D.

A counselor told me about a scene she had witnessed in a primary classroom that illustrates how these concepts can be internalized even by very young children. A first-grade teacher taught the concepts. After giving a lesson, the teacher announced that, when the follow up assignment was completed, students could go to one of the activity centers. A few minutes later, the noise level began to rise. One of the first-graders stood up and announced, "Anarchy! This is anarchy!" Within moments, the noise level dropped. Rather than relying on the teacher to be "the boss," the students managed themselves.

At the upper elementary and middle school levels, two sessions might be planned for teaching the program. At the high school level, the program can be taught in one lesson. The key in every case is to make the examples relevant to the community of learners, whether the students are first-graders or high school seniors. But effectively teaching the concepts requires more than just introducing and defining the vocabulary. Students also need to be actively engaged in constructing their own examples of each level, making the examples specific to their own situations. This can be accomplished by engaging students in activities in which they relate their experiences to the various levels. They can share their examples in small groups, for instance, or the entire class can create example scenarios set in the classroom, school, or neighborhood.

After students fully understand the levels, a teacher can stop an unpleasant class situation with a simple, "Do you want me to become a level-B teacher today?" Students invariably reply, "No, we will be more responsible." What a nice and simple way to solve the

problem! The class is given a choice, the class is empowered, and students self-evaluate to exercise self-control. If the students are not at level C or D, the teacher will operate on level B—just to survive. But the students understand that they have made that determination.

Teaching the vocabulary and concepts is the foundation of the entire program. Such teaching:

- Fosters communication;
- Creates awareness of social responsibility as a value;
- Encourages students to exercise self-control;
- Emphasizes that students choose their own level of behavior;
- Encourages students to maintain an environment conducive to learning, rather than always relying on the teacher to do so;
- Helps students to distinguish between inappropriate behavior and the person who behaves inappropriately (separates the act from the actor); and
- Provides the first of a three-part strategy to create and maintain a positive, noncoercive learning environment.

Checking for Understanding

Teaching the vocabulary and concepts lays the groundwork for the second part of the social responsibility program, checking for understanding. Both of these parts are based on simple cognitive learning theory: teaching (vocabulary and concepts) and then testing (checking for understanding). Checking for understanding is used when a student demonstrates socially unacceptable behavior by disrupting the class.

Checking for understanding is a direct intervention. Before using this intervention, however, the teacher should use unobtrusive techniques. Such strategies include:

- Eye contact;
- Facial expression;
- Looking at the disrupting student for a second or two beyond the normal—but with a slight smile;
- A nod of the head;
- A change in voice (such as using a pause, inflection, or reducing volume to almost a whisper);
- Moving to a new location;
- A signal for attention, such as all raising hands;
- A release of tension, such as breathing out and then taking a deep breath in;
- A variety of “sssshhhh,” such as “You ssssssshhhhhhould be listening now”;
- A subtle hint, such as “Thank you, John” or “Please, Sandy”;
- A friendly request, such as “Thank you for your attention” or “Please ask yourself if that meets the standards of the class”; or
- A friendly question, such as “If you *could* do something about that, what would you choose?”

If the disruption cannot be handled by an unobtrusive approach, then a direct application of checking for understanding is called for.

Checking for understanding is a questioning strategy. Counselors use this strategy one-on-one. But how does the teacher employ this strategy in the classroom? If the teacher already has taught the concepts, the teacher questions the student to see if he or she understands the concepts. Although it is always preferable to speak about misbehavior to students on a one-to-one basis, an advantage of this strategy is that the questioning can be done in front of the class without alienating the disruptive student. An additional advantage of using this strategy is that instructional time is not wasted during the short teacher-student exchange, because the levels of social development are being reinforced for the whole class.

The key to successfully using checking for understanding lies in having taught the four levels. Using this common base of understanding, the teacher can move into a guidance mode when a disruption occurs by simply asking the student to identify the behavioral level of his or her actions. The student is not asked to describe the behavior, just the behavioral level. Following are some sample dialogues:

Teacher: On what level is that behavior?

Student: I don't know.

T: Tell me a civility standard in our class.

S: Not to be talking when the teacher is.

T: Then you are making your own standards. What level is that?

S: B.

T: Thank you.

***

Teacher: On what level is that behavior?

Student: He was doing it, too.

T: That was not the question. Let's try it again. On what level is that behavior?

S: I don't know.

T: What level is it when someone bothers others?

S: I don't know.

T: The letter comes right after A in the alphabet. What letter comes after A?

S: B.

T: Thank you.

***

Teacher: Would it be right for everyone to operate on that level?

Student: No.

T: What level do we call it when someone makes his own rules and bothers others?

S: I don't know.

T: As capable as you are, that is hard to believe. Class, can anyone help?

***

The purpose of checking for understanding is to help the disrupting student simply to acknowledge the level of social responsibility he or she is exhibiting. When the student acknowledges the level of behavior, the misconduct usually not only stops, but students from kindergarten to about grade nine often apologize. The teacher does not ask a student to apologize. The apology is offered as a natural byproduct of accepting responsibility and realizing that the behavior was not socially responsible.

Once students understand that the teacher is not going to punish but is interested in having students develop self-control and social responsibility, a more positive climate has been created. When students do not fear punishment, they become more responsible. This goes against the traditional notion of punishment as instructive. Indeed, when children feel threatened, they become alienated from others. Students who do not fear punishment can more readily 1) acknowledge inappropriate behavior, 2) self-evaluate, 3) take ownership, and 4) develop a plan for better behavior.

Not punishing the student and not telling the student what to do can lead to a fundamental change in the classroom environment. The strategy operates on the same theory taught by W. Edwards Deming (1986), in whose name the highest Japanese award is given for quality. Deming understood that no one can legislate or dictate intrinsic motivation (desire), performance, productivity, or quality. His approach was to use self-evaluation for participant empowerment. Similarly, many teachers do not think of discipline in terms of self-evaluation and student empowerment. Equating discipline with punishment is a mistake that hampers the development of social responsibility.

The questioning used in checking for understanding is neither coercive nor negative; it is a way for the teacher to guide the student to acknowledge a level of behavior. Most often the acknowledged level will be B, making one's own rules. The questioning process is very

short. And students already have learned that level B is a level of irresponsible classroom behavior.

Ineffective questions during checking for understanding will be counterproductive. For example, asking, “What are you doing?” can lead to an unproductive confrontation or justification. Asking, “What level is that behavior?” refers to the levels previously taught. The teacher is merely checking to see if the student understands the levels. The dialogue is not confrontational. The student finds it easy to respond because he or she is not directly attacked. The focus is the *level* of behavior, not the details of behavior. And, again, the behavior is separated from the individual.

Using Guided Choices

When a student has acknowledged level-B behavior and again disrupts the class, authority without punishment is used. This is the third phase of the social development program: guided choices. Predetermined choices are given in the form of questions. *The person who asks the questions controls the situation*. However, as long the student can make a decision, regardless of how small it is, his or her dignity can be preserved and confrontation can be avoided.

Teachers can be tough without being punitive. Authority and punishment are sometimes confused, but as Lee Salk, the noted psychologist, rightly said, “What discipline is not is punishment” (1992, p. 47). Similarly, use of authority does not lead inevitably to punishment. Learning social responsibility is like any other type of learning. Students are not punished for not learning math; they are given opportunities to learn, relearn, and practice. The same must be true for learning social skills.

In early grades, guided-choice activities may include having the disrupting student draw the incident, talk into a tape recorder, or describe it to another student or adult aide in the form of a story. Primary teachers can temporarily isolate a disruptive student from the rest of the class to help the student think about his or her behavior.

In upper elementary grades, middle grades, and high schools, a simple written form that contains three questions might be used:

- What *did* I do?
- What *can* I do to prevent it from happening again?
- What *will* I do?

Any form that is developed for guided choice should meet two criteria: It should foster student reflection, and it should involve future planning. It is important to note that the “why” question should be avoided as counterproductive; “why” questions engender excuses. Indeed, students often do not know, or understand, why they behave as they do.

Guided choice also means using authority without being confrontational. In the upper grades, for example, the form can be handed to the disrupting student with one of the following questions:

- “Would you rather complete the activity in your seat or in the rear of the room?”

- “Would you rather complete the activity by yourself or would you prefer to have someone help you?”
- “Would you rather complete the activity in the classroom or in the office?”

The specific question will depend on the teacher’s appraisal of the student and the situation.

Two benefits result from using guided choice. First, the disrupting student is isolated from the class activity so that regular instruction can continue. Second, the disrupting student is given a responsibility-producing activity that assists him or her to think about the disruption and to develop a plan for a higher level of behavior in the future.

It is important that, if a written form is used, the student is responsible for completing it, not the teacher. The student may have a choice about how the form is completed (by himself or with another student’s assistance, in his seat or in the back of the room), but he or she is the responsible person. Authority is used in that an activity is given to the student to complete; confrontation is avoided because the student is given a choice and retains some power.

When the form has been completed, the teacher quickly glances at it to see if the student has acknowledged responsibility for the disruption. If not, the form is returned to the student, or a new form given, with the simple admonition that the student had not acknowledged responsibility. But if the student has acknowledged responsibility (or gives insight into a situation where other students were involved), the student rejoins the class activity. The completed form need not be kept on file. One way to show the student that the teacher is interested only in the student’s growth—and not in punishing the student—is for the teacher to discard the form in front of the student. The form has served its purpose: halting disruptive activity and fostering self-growth.

As long as the student has a choice, the student retains personal power and respect. When a student feels powerless and loses respect and dignity, confrontation is more likely. Confrontation decreases the potential for learning social responsibility and also may escalate a minor disruption into a major loss of instructional time and focus.

Even if the disrupting student communicates that he or she will not complete the self-evaluation form, the student still is given a choice. In middle and high school, the teacher might say, “John, I would much prefer to have you remain with the class. However, if you choose to make your own rules, it would not be appropriate to stay in the class because of that level-B behavior.” The teacher would then move away from the student, giving the student space and an opportunity to reflect on his choice.

Guided choice is a “win-win” strategy. The teacher wins because he or she uses a non-stressful, non-confrontational guidance approach that permits a quick return to the lesson. The student wins because his or her dignity is preserved and the time-out activity of guided choice is a learning opportunity, rather than a punishment.

Self-Diagnostic Referral

In cases where a student continues to disrupt the lesson, completing a self-diagnostic referral form can be the next step. This form—also to be completed by the student, not the teacher—would be kept on file. It should contain the following items:

- Describe the problem that resulted in getting this assignment.
- Tell the level of behavior.
- Explain this level.
- Explain how the behavior is on this level.
- When acting on this level, on what level must the teacher act?
- Is this how you want to be treated?
- Why or why not?
- On what level should you have acted to be socially responsible?
- If you had acted on this level, how would the situation have been different?
- List three solutions to the problem that you could use to act more responsibly.

If a second self-diagnostic referral form were to be filled out by the student, a copy of the first and the second would go home, along with a note to the parents. If a third referral becomes necessary, a rule of “three strikes and you are out” can reasonably be employed. Copies of all three self-diagnostic referrals would be mailed to the parent along with a second parent note indicating that the teacher has exhausted every means to foster social responsibility.

Two middle school students come to mind who had three referrals sent home. These are the type of students who will “push” as far as they can. I will call them Jason and Robert. Both boys are the type of student that, when a teacher wakes up in the morning, the first thought is, “I hope Jason and Robert are absent today.” When the boys already had completed three self-diagnostic referrals, my next step was to have copies of all three self-diagnostic referrals ready to be sent to the office with a standard office referral. I placed the office referral on their desks, already completed except for the date, and said, “I would prefer you to stay in the classroom; but if you act on level B again, you are telling me that you want to continue to make your own rules. That is not acceptable. On the next disruption, you have made the choice to go to the office.”

There is a saying that some people see the light only when they feel the heat. These were the type of students who had to see the result of their next disruption in concrete form—right in front of them. I was prepared to make a referral to the office; it was never necessary.

Conclusion

The strategy used in this social development program differs from other approaches in a number of significant ways. First, the program starts with Stephen Covey's first habit of highly effective people: Be proactive (1990). The idea is to set the stage for dealing with disruptive behaviors before they occur. This is in contrast to the usual reactive strategy of dealing with disruptive behaviors after they occur.

Second, neither rewards nor punishments (or "consequences," which also are viewed as negative) are used. Authority, when necessary, is used without punishment.

Third, a guiding approach, rather than a telling approach, is used, because the most effective way to change behavior is to provide conditions under which behavior change is self-motivated. Self-evaluation is the most effective approach to achieve a lasting change in behavior, and so it is used consistently in the program.

Fourth, choice is a keystone. Making choices is important, because the choices people make affect their lives. Choice empowers, and so students are empowered to change their behavior when they are given the freedom to make choices.

Fifth, the strategies rest on sound education principles. Deductive teaching means that concepts are taught first, before specifics. Constructivist teaching is used because this approach is more effective when emphasizing thinking, understanding, and self-control. Also, the constructivist approach fosters specificity to each class, regardless of grade level or subject.

Finally, the classroom is viewed as an ideal setting in which to teach social responsibility, and disruption is seen as a teachable moment. The focus of the teacher is on a "winning" outcome for both teacher and student. Therefore, teaching social responsibility in this way reduces stress for both teacher and student.

The real power of teachers is seen not in what students do when they are with teachers, but in what they do when they are not. Many of society's problems can be traced to social irresponsibility, selfishness that has no concern for the greater good. By teaching a social development hierarchy, by using a guidance approach when social irresponsibility occurs in the classroom, and—when necessary—by using authority without punishment, educators empower students to manage themselves. Using the social development program fosters social responsibility.

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